

Earlier this week the US media in Washington contacted influential political figures to try to ascertain whether legalized and regulated online gambling could become a reality in the country this year. There are two online gambling bills currently at committee stage in the House of Assembly.

Texas Congressman Joe Barton's bill focuses on Internet poker rather than online gambling generally.

**Californian Congressman John Campbell's** bill deals with all of online gambling. Barton's bill is less contentious and therefore has a greater chance of being passed.

Some interesting comparisons were revealed in the media consultations. Barton's bill proposes a regulatory and licensing regime overseen by the Department of Commerce. **Campbell's** bill proposes that the Secretary of the Treasury should be responsible for the licensing of online gambling. Both bills give the states the option of exclusion from the regime. Politicians were unanimous that any of the bills could be passed only if were to be included somehow in the lame duck session of Congress. The reasons are overloaded work schedules, the summer recess and presidential elections.

Speaking to the Sun Bulletin, one of the media houses involved in this exercise, Barton said that the need for his bill was crucial. He pointed out that the bill provides one federal standard for the integrity of the game and the protection of the financial interests of players. The alternative scenario was "fractured rules and regulations that vary state to state, leaving more opportunity for fraud and fewer safeguards for players".

Barton averred that there was positive bi-partisan support for the bill and that it would be voted on by the House and Senate in this session. However, his staff was more realistic, pointing out the time was against them particularly as no further hearings had been set yet.

**Campbell's** communications director, Chris Bognanno, also spoke about bi-partisan support within and outside Congress. He said that a lame-duck session result was possible, but 2013 was a more realistic timeframe.

The media also contacted organizations and personalities that were against the passage of either bill. A spokesman for Representative Mary Bono Mack, who convened the hearings on online gambling, said that there was no consensus and that there were tribal issues which have to be sorted out.

Keith Whyte, executive director of the National Council on Problem Gambling, referred to the risk involved for both political parties in supporting online gambling legalization in an election year. The National Indian Gaming Association, which represents 184 different tribes, said it does not support either bill. T

he media also contacted the American Gaming Association, but it drew a “no comment”. The association is known to support a federal rather than state-by-state legalization.